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ABSTRACT

The paper offers a brief history of adaptive behavior measurement; the concept of adaptation was first introduced by Herber in 1959. An Adaptive Behavior Scale (ABS) sponsored by the American Association on Mental Deficiency (AAMD) was applied to schools--the Public School Version (PSV)--about 10 years ago, the first of many such measures. To investigate research conducted in the area of adaptive behavior measurement over the past decade, six major journals (Journal of School Psychology, Psychology in the Schools, School Psychology Review, Exceptional Children, American Journal of Mental Deficiency, and Mental Retardation) were reviewed to determine trends. Specific trends were noted for individual journals as well as across journals. Trends included efforts to develop new scales as well as to shorten already existing scales. It was found that the research tends to address measurement and use of adaptive behavior information while ignoring examination of the conceptual nature of adaptive behavior. (CL)

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Trends in Adaptive Behavior Research
Over the Past Decade

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Abstract

It has been ten years since the AAMD Adaptive Behavior Scale - Public School Version (ABS-PSV) was introduced as the first adaptive behavior scale normed on a public school population. Since that time, the number of adaptive behavior scales seems to have multiplied at a rate faster than our understanding of the concept. In order to investigate research conducted in this area over the past decade, six major journals were reviewed to determine trends. Specific trends were noted for individual journals as well as across journals. Research tends to address measurement and use of adaptive behavior information and ignores discussions of the conceptual nature of adaptive behavior.

Trends in Adaptive Behavior Research Over the Past Decade

The concept of adaptation was first introduced as a classification dimension into the area of mental retardation in 1959 by Heber when he developed the Manual of terminology & classification in mental retardation (Heber, 1959). In 1965, in response to the call for a more adequate measure of adaptive behavior, a proposed project sponsored by the American Association on Mental Deficiency (AAMD), and funded by the National Institute of Mental Health, was established at Parsons State Hospital and Training Center. The result of this project was the development of the Adaptive Behavior Scale (Nihina, Foster, Shellhaas, & Leland, 1969). However, once again, like the Vineland Social Maturity Scale, the resulting instrument was mainly suitable for use with persons in residential institutions.

About this same time, public school systems were starting to develop programs for the mentally retarded. In 1971, the California State Education Code mandated the inclusion of a measure of adaptive behavior as part of the psychological examination for those students being considered for placement in EMR programs (Lambert, Windmiller, Cole, & Figueroa, 1975).

Just as the AAMD guidelines of 1959 and 1961 seemed to be premature in light of the fact that no adequately developed measure was available, so also were the California guidelines. No measure of adaptive behavior was available, at that time, which was suitable for use with public school age children. In response to the need, a study was conducted by Lambert, Gleason,

and Wilcox (1972) to determine which measures of adaptive behavior would be most appropriate for use with public school children. The results indicated that no available scales had normative data on public school children attending either regular and/or special education classes. In 1975, Lambert, Windmiller, Cole, and Figueroa published an adaptive behavior scale which was standardized on a public school population. The instrument used for the standardization was the 1974 revision of the AAMD Adaptive Behavior Scale (Nihira, Foster, Shellhaas, & Leland, 1974). The final scale was the AAMD Adaptive Behavior Scale - Public School Version which was later updated as the AAMD Adaptive Behavior Scale - School Edition (Lambert, Windmiller, Tharinger, & Cole, 1981).

It has been ten years since the AAMD Adaptive Behavior Scale Public School Version was introduced as the first adaptive behavior scale normed on a public school population. Since that time, the number of adaptive behavior instruments seems to have multiplied at a rate faster than our understanding of the concept. There have been repeated calls to investigate the concept of adaptive behavior as well as developing more instruments which purport to measure adaptive behavior skills.

The present investigation was intended to review the literature in the area of adaptive behavior over the past decade since the AAMD Adaptive Behavior Scale - Public School Version was first normed on a public school population. Major journals were reviewed in order to determine trends such as: instruments being

utilized in research, what populations are being used as samples, how adaptive behavior scales are being used in research, and finally, whether the concept of adaptive behavior is really being explored in order to add to our understanding and bring about possible changes in our approaches to measuring adaptive behavior skills.

The journals reviewed were the Journal of School Psychology, Psychology in the Schools, School Psychology Review, Exceptional Children, American Journal of Mental Deficiency, and Mental Retardation. These journals were chosen because of their relationship to mental retardation and therefore adaptive behavior and because of the likelihood that school psychologists would have access to them on a regular basis.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of adaptive behavior research over the past decade from these journals. Data is broken down by journal, population (sample groups used in the research), scales used, and concepts measured.

Insert Table 1 about here

Analysis of this information reveals definite trends in adaptive behavior research. Research in journals such as the American Journal of Mental Deficiency and Mental Retardation tend to use non-public school populations for their samples while other journals reviewed report results from research completed on students in public school settings. It is also interesting to note that while the "better known" adaptive

behavior scales such as the Adaptive Behavior Scale, Adaptive Behavior Scale - School Edition, Adaptive Behavior Inventory for Children and the Vineland Social Maturity Scale, are used a great deal in research, there were several instruments such as the Wisconsin Behavior Rating Scale and the Minnesota Developmental Programming Systems Behavior Scales which were developed and researched by state agencies as alternatives to more established adaptive behavior scales.

Besides efforts to develop new scales, efforts have been made to shorten already existing scales. The Behavior Development Survey (Sutter, et al., 1980) was an effort to develop a short form of the ABS which might be appropriate for use with community placed mentally retarded adults.

A number of other instruments were developed to help assess changes in individuals placed in vocational training programs. Scales such as the Social and Prevocational Information Battery have been investigated (Halpern, et al., 1979; Halpern, et al., 1975; Irvin, & Halpern, 1977) along with the Vocational Adaptation Rating Scale (Magady, et al., 1980) and were seen as alternatives to the Adaptive Behavior Scale.

These efforts at developing alternative measures of adaptive behavior support Adams' (1973) contention that even simple and convenient measures of adaptive behavior are often found by clinicians to be of limited value. If clinicians cannot see the value of easier instruments, more complicated instruments would

hardly be expected to be widely accepted. A second reason for the development of alternative measures may relate to the overall purpose of measuring adaptive behavior. Coulter and Morrow (1978) view adaptive behavior measurement as fulfilling two purposes: identification/placement and intervention/programming. Leland (1977) goes further reporting that there are three general uses for adaptive behavior measurement: (1) as a direct report of behavioral skills and coping strategies for the purpose of program planning or treatment, (2) as a functional instrument for program evaluation, and (3) as an aid to diagnosis and classification. Perhaps "traditional" measures fail in their efforts to support the broad-based need of assessing adaptive behavior skills. A final reason for the development of alternative measures may relate to the idea that norm-referenced instruments are best for classification/placement while criterion-referenced instruments are seen as being better for planning/intervention needs (Reschly, 1982). Many professionals may agree that the available norm-referenced instruments are of limited value in setting up individual education plans (IEP) or other instructional plans.

A final area investigated in the current review of the literature on adaptive behavior was what concepts were measured. By far, most research concentrated on test constructs such as reliability and validity of adaptive behavior instruments. This trend spread throughout all journals and with both school and non-school samples. Another trend of concepts measured dealt

with "changes in behaviors" which was emphasized in the American Journal of Mental Deficiency and Mental Retardation. Here emphasis was placed on changes made by being placed in a community home rather than a residential setting or changes made by being involved in some type of vocational training program. In the other journals where school samples were mainly used as the reference group, there seemed to be a heavier emphasis of research on group differences. Studies dealing with group differences examined differences among classification groups (i.e., mentally retarded, slow learner, regular students).

Obvious by their absence, were articles discussing the theory of adaptive behavior. Several articles discussed adaptive behavior in broad generalities such as: the importance of adaptive behavior measurement in nonbiased assessment, how to better interpret more complicated scales, the need for adaptive behavior assessment, and the role of adaptive behavior in incidence/prevalence rates. It appears that, for the most part, we are still allowing adaptive behavior instruments to dictate the concept and understanding of the measurement of adaptive behavior.

Reschly (1982) makes the point that one of the most challenging areas for school psychologists in the 1980s deals

with better understanding of the conceptualization, measurement, and use of adaptive behavior data. We are now half way through the 1980s and appear to be ignoring the conceptualization issue and dealing more with measurement and use of adaptive behavior information. Isn't that a case of putting the cart before the horse? For without a clear understanding of the concept, how can we ever logically discuss measurement and use of adaptive behavior information?

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Table 1
Breakdown of Adaptive Behavior
Research by Journal

Journal*	Number of Articles	Population*	Scale*	Concept Measured*
JSP	9	School-8 None-2	ABS-1 ABS-PSU-4 ABIC-5 CABS-1	Group differences-2 Factors influencing-1 Test construct-6
PS	9	Non-school-1 School-6 None-2	ABS-3 ABS-PSU-4 ABIC-2 CABS-1 VSMS-2	Group differences-1 Factors influencing-1 Test construct-5 Theory/ description-1 Interview/ observation-1
SPR	14	School-4 None-10	ABS-1 ABIC-9 CABS-1	Group differences-1 Factors influencing-1 Test construct-3 Theory/ description-9
EC	11	Non-school-1 School-5 None-5	ABS-2 ABS-PSU-1 ABIC-1 VSMS-1 BRP-1 Alpern- Boll-1 Cain- Lavine-2 Career A.B. Inventory-1	Group differences-4 Factors influencing-2 Test construct-1 Theory/ description-3 Changes in behavior-1

AJMD	61	Non-school-41	ABS-32	Group
		School-15	ABS-PSV-4	differences-6
		None-4	ABIC-3	Factors
			CABS-1	influencing-2
			VSMS-4	Test
			Alpern-	construct-32
			Boll-1	Theory/
			Adap. Beh.	description-9
			Cklist-1	Changes in
			Balthazar-1	behavior-13
			BRIR-1	Interview/
			THINK-2	observation-1
			Kohn Social	
			Competence-1	
			Voc. Adaptation	
			Rating Scale-1	
			Adap. Functioning	
			Index-1	
			Behavior Devel.	
			Survey-2	
			Personal Competency	
			Scale-1	
			Wis. Behavior Rating	
			Scale-1	
			Minn. Dev. Programming	
			System Beh. Scales-1	
			Social & Prevocational	
			Info. Battery-3	
MR	23	Non-school-11	ABS-11	Group
		School-1	ABS-PSV-3	differences-3
		None-11	VSMS-1	Test
			Balthazar-1	construct-4
			Adap. Beh.	Theory/
			Cklist-1	description-9
			Adap. Beh.	Changes in
			Survey-1	behaviors-7
			Family Beh.	
			Profile-1	
			Progress Assess.	
			Chart-1	
			Minn. Dev. Programming	
			System Beh. Scales-1	

JSP - Journal of School Psychology
 PS - Psychology in the Schools
 SPR - School Psychology Review (Digest)
 EC - Exceptional Children
 AJMD - American Journal of Mental Deficiency
 MR - Mental Retardation

Population - "non-school" refers to individuals in residential, community homes, institutions, or non-public school systems. "none" refers to articles where no specific group was used as a reference group.

Scale - the total number of scales may exceed the total number of articles because of more than one scale being used/discussed in an article.

Concept measured - "group differences" refers to differences among mentally retarded, slow learners, regular students, and teachers vs parents. "Factors influencing" refers to variables such as IQ, sex, ethnic status. "Changes in behavior" refers to changes in vocational skills, adaptation to living situations, or adaptive behavior skills in general over time.